

Suggested Remarks
Steven Edminster, USAID/OEDG
2nd Transparent and Accountable Governance Project
Partners' Conference
Waterfront Insular Hotel, Davao City
August 24, 2007, 4:00 p.m.

Distinguished Guests;

Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of the American people, I am delighted to have the opportunity to join you for this conference that brings together partners from 16 cities across Mindanao participating in the Transparent and Accountable Governance (TAG) project.

I hope this event has provided the opportunity for you, as representatives of local government and the business and NGO sectors, to share with one another best practices and lessons learned, assess what has worked well and what hasn't, and formulate recommendations on future directions for improving local governance.

The U.S. Government's support for local governance in the Philippines is part of a broader effort through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist partners working to strengthen democratic institutions and practices around the world. U.S. Government-funded democracy and governance programs worldwide focus on the key sectors that contribute to democratic development – from building the capacity of civil society, strengthening the rule of law, supporting electoral reform and more transparent and representative political parties, and last, but certainly not least, improving governance at both the national and local levels.

In the Philippines, we believe that USAID support to local partners in the areas of democracy and governance, along with our work in economic policy reform, conflict reduction, health, environment and education are all contributing towards development in the

country, particularly in Mindanao where a majority of our resources are focused.

While there are many pressing issues in all of these sectors, local governance here in Mindanao has a special significance. Since cities are the engines of most countries' economic growth, the TAG Project's work in 16 cities here in Mindanao has been particularly important. With TAG's help, these city governments have reduced the cost of doing business by enhancing the responsiveness of city governments to business. When taken together with other important factors, such as the dynamism of the local economy and the existence of sufficient infrastructure and human resources, these results send a very positive message to potential investors.

Ultimately, as TAG cities become more competitive and attract more business activity, the poor gain faster and greater access to

the benefits of economic growth, and city governments can better address the needs of their residents.

I have also been very impressed with your collective approach to improving city governance embodied in the Mindanao-wide and individual City Coalitions for Transparent and Accountable Governance (CCTAGs) under the TAG project. As representatives of the business community, non-governmental organizations and city governments, you are working together to ensure that all have been included in the dialogue on how to improve government services to make them more friendly to both business and the average person. This open and collaborative approach is not only important in its own right, but also results in better, more practical solutions for real problems.

In closing, I have enjoyed meeting with you this afternoon and hearing your views on both the innovations and challenges to local governance here in Mindanao. We at USAID hope that you have

found this event a useful opportunity to network and learn from each other. Having worked on the TAG project for several years now, I have been very impressed with what I have seen. Still, I feel confident that a great deal more is achievable and that the best days of local governance in Mindanao lie not too far ahead.

Thank you and good afternoon.